

Reflections on primary resource material research in Lahania, a Greek village on the island of Rhodes, and migration to Thebarton, Adelaide, South Australia.

Part One

Claude Hedrick

Arriving in the village of Lahania on the island of Rhodes in 1978 I had as my primary goal to determine why some two hundred persons had emigrated from this village to Thebarton, an inner suburb of Adelaide, South Australia. Eventually, I gained access to an extensive range of official records housed in the village office with the exceptional support of K. Ιωάννης Γαλαντόμας and the village council, of which Ιωάννης was then secretary. In addition, Ιωάννης and three other men were formally interviewed, focusing on developing pictures of the social, economic and historical fabric of the village, as well as material on religious customs and traditions. Other collective approaches were used to involve the villagers in sharing their knowledge. Briefly stated, my research established the immense strength of certain interconnections, with family as the core element. Threats to any of these elements or their interconnections produced a family survival reaction.

Introduction

In the 1970s there was a saying that was very popular in the inner city suburb of Thebarton in Adelaide, South Australia, that ran: “*The Greeks in Thebarton are more Greek than the Greeks in Greece*”. What did this mean? I started grappling with this question by interviewing Greek settlers in this suburb about their migration experiences. While these interviews were enlightening about the Greek settlement process from many different periods and points of origin, it did not readily help me understand the “why”. I decided I needed to trace a significant migration movement from its source. The village I chose had 140 settlers in the Thebarton local government area

as at the 1966 Australian census, out of a total of 1,854 Greeks, a representation of over 7% of the Greek background population.

This is a small part of the story of migration from the village of Lahania on the eastern side of the island of Rhodes to Adelaide and other places, as found in the living memory of villagers both here and in the village and in their official records.

The village of Lahania

Some of the earliest and most exotic memories to be found amongst present-day villagers relate to occasional visits by ships from ports all around the Mediterranean basin. These ships anchored off the shore of the village, brought news of the outside world, and took on loads of lemons, an early speciality of the village. Equally strong are stories of sojourns of three to four months (pre-harvest and post-seeding), on the nearby Anatolian mainland. In Anatolia, the villagers worked as labourers and some bought land with running water, erected flour mills and then employed impoverished Turkish villagers to run the mills. Gold coin gained from these activities formed an important part of the dowry system. After World War One these forays into Turkey were stopped. Half a century later, as these memories began to fade, over two hundred and fifty Lahanians had sailed away in similar ships with many never to return. A majority of the dowries were subsequently found in the factories or fields, in places like Adelaide and Biloela in Australia, or Baltimore in the United States of America.

The most fundamental set of memories relate to the village as a relatively closed, subsistence village; that is, the village and its people were able to provide or find in the environs of the village nearly everything necessary to support a community of up to five hundred people in the middle of the nineteenth century. In some respects, these memories are not old ones. For example, mechanised agriculture only began in the village in 1960, with the arrival of the first tractor. Even in the late 1970s, a few villagers were still sowing and harvesting crops by hand. Changes in the subsistence character of the village and pressures acting upon it were directly related to emigration. Furthermore, the relationships that had developed between the environment, the economy and the community in the village had been shaped by long experience. At the centre of the system was the individual family unit. Interaction between the community, the economy and the environment had been codified by religion and focused very strongly on ensuring that the family unit was protected and had every chance of survival.

This paper will thread together some of the more dramatic threats to the family unit and the types of responses to these threats. It will focus on the period 1900 to the end of the 1920s. A second paper is planned to bring the story up to the 1970s.

Lahania prior to 1920

In the opening years of the twentieth century, the lemon groves of Lahania were destroyed by disease. The destruction of the groves eliminated one feature which

distinguished this village from most of the other villages on the island of Rhodes. But more importantly, the loss of the lemons meant that the villagers were deprived of a source of cash income that was an integral part of the dowry system. Then, after 1908, the effects of the Young Turk movement began to be felt in the village. An immediate consequence of the Turkish nationalist movement was that Rhodians lost their access to Turkey. Thus, within the space of a few years, the villagers lost an important crop and entry into Turkey, hence losing their two main sources of income. However, these were not the only events which placed pressure on the internal workings of the village before 1920.

By 1910 another policy of the Young Turk movement intruded directly into the lives of the people of Lahania. One man, who was living in Turkey at this time, was conscripted into the Turkish army, along with an unknown number of other Dodecanese Greeks. Lahania itself did not escape this situation. Turkish officials infrequently visited the village for the purpose of conscripting able-bodied men into the army. How many visits were made or the number of men who were conscripted from the village itself, are not parts of the oral tradition of present-day villagers. What is remembered is that most able-bodied men spent nearly two years hiding in the hills surrounding the village, thereby placing an additional workload on the women of the village. Conscription ceased to threaten following the occupation of the Dodecanese by the Italians in 1912. However, present-day villagers talk of an acute economic depression that gripped the village for most of the second decade of that century. The details of this situation have now been forgotten. This decade would have been a difficult one for the village. But the pressure on the village did not stop at this point.

Table 1 details an estimate of the population of the village at the end of 1920. What is immediately obvious is that females exceeded their male counterparts and that this was particularly evident in the age range of infant to twenty years of age. This situation was to have a long-term impact on Lahania.

Table 1: *Estimated population of Lahania at the end of 1920*

Age Range	Locally Born		Non Local		Total	Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F
0 – 10	27	42			27	42
11 – 20	17	36	1	2	18	38
21 – 30	25	21	1		25	22
31 – 40	13	16	1		14	16
41 – 50	19	14			19	14
51 – 60	9	19			9	19
61 – 70	1	1			1	1
71 +	1	3			1	3
Totals	112	152	2	3	114	155

Source: Compiled from the Italian and Greek Individual and Family Registers.¹

¹ The following individual and family registers (Italian and British), the Parish Register of Lahania and

In the following table, showing the age ranges of the non-married by gender in 1920, it is clear that there were more unmarried females than males in the critical age range of 11 to 20. There were two responses to these situations. The more traditional response was for men to spend a short time in nearby Turkey, and six did so after 1912, usually to provide added value to a dowry for a sister. A slightly more extreme example took place around the same time, ultimately for the same result. One family in the village had nine children, two males and seven females. Two of the daughters moved to the island of Hydra in 1910 and another daughter to the city of Rhodes in 1920. Under the dowry and land inheritance customs (land passed down the female line) a family of this size had few choices if a number of daughters were to be settled in marriage in the village. Land was divided between each daughter married in the village on an equitable basis including such characteristics as different soil types, topography, rainfall and accessibility. A house, household goods, tools, a garden, animals and olive trees were parts of the dowry system too.

Table 2: *Estimated numbers of single persons and marital status unknown at 1920*

Age Range	Single M	Single F	Not known M	Not known F
0 – 10	26	39		
11 – 20	19	29	3	1
21 – 30	13	8		1
31 – 40	1	1	1	1
41 – 50	4	4	1	2
51 – 60	3	4	1	6
61 – 70				1
71 +				2
Totals	67	85	7	14

Source: Compiled from the Italian and Greek Individual and Family Registers.

the school registers housed in the village Office were used to compile population statistics for this paper: “Municipio Si Lacagno, *Ufficio Unico Registro delle Pubblicazioni di Nascita 1929–*; Municipio Si Lacagno, *Ufficio Unico Registro delle Pubblicazione di Morte, 1929–*; Municipio Si Lacagno, *Ufficio Unico Registro delle Pubblicazione di Matrimonio, 1929–*; Municipio Si Lacagno, *Eleno ellittorialle del commune di Lacagno*, Lacagno li 22 Jemaio 1936 (XIV)–; Municipio Si Lacagno, *Foglia di Familigo, 1938–*; Municipio Si Lacagno, *Scheda Individuale, 1938*. These early Italian registers were useful in that they provided names of villagers for the years before 1938 which did not appear in the 1954 Greek register, thus providing a more complete picture of population characteristics for the pre-war period.

The British briefly developed the following three bridging registers: *ΛΑΧΑΝΙΑ Births, 1946–*; *ΛΑΧΑΝΙΑ Deaths 1946–*; and *ΛΑΧΑΝΙΑ Marriages, 1946–*. Then, after union with Greece a new register — *ΛΑΧΑΝΙΑ ΑΠΕΙΡΑΡΧΕΙΟ ΤΗΣ ΛΑΧΑΝΙΑ 1954* — (Parish Register of Lahania) was developed.

I made a handwritten copy of the 151 families on the Parish Register as at 1978. It should be noted that the Parish Register only includes Lahania born or those who had married a person born in Lahania. Each individual on this register held an individual number and a nuclear family number. When individuals married they kept their individual number but were given a new nuclear family number.

As access to Turkey diminished, a new pattern of short-term migration emerged. Nine men and one woman left Lahania for the United States of America between 1914 and 1920. Three of these emigrants were the father, a daughter and a son from the large family commented upon earlier. In an interview (with one of the four formal interviewees mentioned in the Abstract), the son in question told how this journey was undertaken to provide dowries for some of the seven daughters of this family. Out of the other seven men who emigrated, there were two sets of brothers. One set of brothers provided a dowry for an older sister who was married in 1916, at the advanced age, by village standards, of twenty-five. A remaining sister was married at twenty-three in 1928. So the need to provide dowries seems to have prompted the migration of these two brothers too. This was not the case for the other set of brothers; their elder and only sister was married in 1910, four years before they migrated. No sibling history is available for the remaining three male emigrants. With the exception of the father of the large family, all the male emigrants from Lahania were aged between twelve and twenty-three. Six of these émigrés returned to Lahania in 1920, a characteristic of migration in the near future.

The village in the 1920s

Imbalances in the population structure also had profound effects on families during the decade 1921 to 1930. One effect was that the average age at which males married rose, from twenty-five previously, to twenty-nine in this decade. In turn, this situation was exacerbated by a tradition of female sibling priority in marriage over their male siblings, which kept many males out of the marriage market longer. Of eleven marriages involving females where full familial details are known, seven conformed to this tradition. Furthermore, all the females in the seven families involved married in strict order of seniority. In two of the four cases where the tradition was broken, there were extenuating circumstances. The two women involved were from the large family mentioned earlier. Of three other marriages, where at least one sibling can be traced, the traditional order seems to have applied in two cases. Thus in fourteen marriages, up to nine followed the tradition. Unfortunately, no familial history can be found for seven other female marriages. There is also little information about the siblings of males who married during this decade. In the case of males, the tradition seems to have applied in four out of five cases.

Another tradition associated with marriage challenged families in the village in this period. The following table shows that the tradition of endogamous marriages was no longer the norm that it had been in previous decades.

Table 3: *Endogamous and Exogamous Marriages 1921–1930*

Year	Endogamous	Exogamous
1921		1
1922	2	1
1923	1	2
1924	1	
1925	4	
1926	1	
1927	1	
1928	1	1
1929		3
1930		3
Totals	11	11

Source: Compiled from the Italian and Greek Individual and Family Registers.

It is clear that families attempted to honour marriage traditions in light of the shortage of males. However, it is also evident that the imbalanced sex ratio was beginning to force families to depart from this and other traditions.

As Lahanians were beginning to struggle with these issues internally, the outside world rushed into the village. After the 1923 war between Greece and Turkey the Italians were continued in their occupation of the Dodecanese. Initially, this resulted in a boom period for the village. The Italians introduced a plough with an iron tip which dramatically increased the efficiency and effectiveness of farming. Villagers were encouraged to extend their grape production and to sell the surplus to the Italians. Road and bridge building in the vicinity opened up a new and easily accessible cash economy. School records show that the ratios of male/female attendance at school and grades reached changed markedly between 1902–1920 and 1921–1930. More females attended school in the second time period and they remained at school for more years. This amounted to another major cultural shift, in that traditionally girls were educated in the home. Finally, there was a house building boom with sixteen houses built in the 1920s compared with only five in the previous two decades.²

² I constructed a map of the dwellings of Lahania by using a compass and pacing out distances and provided each dwelling with a number. A large-scale copy of this map was displayed in the top cafe-nion of the village and owners of the dwellings were invited to place their name against their number and provide a construction date. In fact each dwelling had the year the house was built chiseled over the door into the house or courtyard, but many were totally obscured because of years of whitewash. I located the oldest known house in the village, that of 1720, which was uninhabited in 1978. The villagers identified the construction dates for forty-nine homes and the owners of one hundred and fifty-nine dwellings out of the total of one hundred and seventy that I found.

The data about the increased proportional attendance of females at school and longer retention rates during 1921–1930 over the preceding time period is from the records — ΛΑΧΑΝΙΑ, ΔΗΜΟΤΙΚΟΝ ΣΧΟΛΕΙΟΝ, ΣΧΟΛΙΚΟΝ ΕΤΟΣ 1903–1978 (Lahania, Primary School, Students of years 1903 to 1978).

But in the village context, there was a huge downside to this boom. The traditional pattern of land distribution via the female dowry system aimed at equity and subsistence. Yet under the open market conditions now being imposed on the village, the land holding pattern was limited and inefficient. These deficiencies were offset for some families by the increased ploughing efficiency. However, this benefit only applied to a few families who had more land than they needed for subsistence; even so, these families were restricted in the extent that they could take advantage of the new conditions because of the limitations in the land system, in that land holdings were multiple, small in area and widely scattered. One woman's land holdings that I saw drawings of numbered twenty widely scattered pieces of land. Under these circumstances a new form of migration began.

Twenty-three men emigrated from Lahania during this period. Twenty of these chose the new destination of Australia and out of these, eight were married and twelve were single as depicted in the table below. This pattern of migration was new in that the distance involved far exceeded the Anatolian journey and prior to 1921 only two married men travelled beyond nearby Anatolia: in that case to go to America. But in the 1920s, America was closed to Lahanians under the Restricted Immigration Acts, unless they had lived in America before these Acts were passed.

Migration and chain migration from Lahania to Australia began in this period. The first two Lahanians in Australia landed at Freemantle in Western Australia in 1923. They worked on a salt pan at Ellis Creek, Western Australia until 1927, when they both returned to the village. One re-emigrated to Australia almost immediately in 1928 and the other in 1929. By the end of this decade eighteen more Lahanians had made a temporary trip to Australia.

Table 4: *Earliest Migration to Australia from Lahania 1923–1930*

Year	Name	Marital Status	Siblings		Children	
			M	F	M	F
1923	Χ'Σημεών, Καλλίστος	Single				
1923	Π'Δημητρίου, Γεώρ.	Married				3
1924	Χριστοδούλου, Ιωάννης	Married				1
1924	Π'Δημητρίου, Δημ.	Single	1	2		
1924	Γαλαντόμας, Αναστάσιος	Single	2	4		
1925	Σταυρίδης, Σταύρος	Single	1	1		
1927	Σταυρίδης, Σεβαστός	Single	1	1		
1927	Κοσμάς, Αναστάσιος	Single				
1927	Χ'Σημεών, Γεώρ.	Married				2
1927	Ακούρης, Βασίλειος	Married			1	1
1927	Γαλαντόμας, Μυριάλλης	Single	2	3		
1927	Φράνγκος, Εμμ.	Single	4	1		
1927	Φιλλίπου, Γεώρ.	Single				

Year	Name	Marital Status	Siblings		Children	
			M	F	M	F
1927	Γαλαντόμας, Αθαν.	Single	1	4		
1927	Κοσμάς, Ευάγγελλος	Single				
1928	Π' Δημητρίου, Γεώρ.	Married				3
1928	Χ' Γεωργίου, Γεώρ.	Married			1	
1928	Κασιώτης, Ιωάννης	Single	2	3		
1929	Χ' Σημεών, Καλλίστος	Single				
1929	Διακογεωργίου, Γεώρ.	Married			1	1
1930	Χνουδής, Χαρ.	Married			3	
1930	Πατσούρης, Χρήστος	Married			1	

Source: Compiled from Italian and Greek Individual and Family Registers and Ιωάννης Γαλαντόμας.

At this point in time, migration was a simple extension of the earlier sojourns in Anatolia and was undertaken for similar reasons. The table above strongly suggests that unmarried siblings and/or daughters were still a major trigger for short-term migration — fourteen emigrants had either unmarried sister(s) or daughter(s) out of twenty in total. Thus the pressures on families to temporarily migrate were still fundamentally unaltered in the 1920s. Families needed to be nurtured and protected at all costs and Greek values and traditions had to be maintained as far as possible. However, these fundamentals came under extreme pressure, beginning in the late 1920s.

Lahania in the late 1920s

Three events in the late 1920s helped set the tone for life in the village in the 1930s and beyond. These events were: the imposition of water restrictions on village gardens, established for the first time in 1929; del Vecchio's statement that he had come to bring the Fascist life and spirit to the Dodecanese, announced in 1928; and the agreement signed between Greece and Italy in 1928 that Greece relinquish all claim to the Dodecanese. These and subsequent events will be addressed in Part Two of this paper. And the 1970s Thebarton saying quoted at the beginning of this paper will be tested for its veracity and meaning as Lahania begin to arrive there in 1938.